

Department of Human Services

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Articles in Today's Clips Monday, March 24, 2008

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Mother of Flint girl who died in lice-infested home may be released soon from prison

by Ron Fonger | The Flint Journal
Saturday March 22, 2008, 9:29 PM



Flint Journal file

photoMichelle Bowen could soon be out of prison.

FLINT -- The mother of 5-year-old Rose Kelley, whose daughter died from liver failure and neglect in her lice-infested home, could soon be out of prison.

The Michigan Parole Board has delayed a decision on parole for Michelle Bowen, 33, as she completes a treatment program -- a possible precursor to her release.

Remembering Rose Kelley

- The 5-year-old girl was found dead inside her home on Flint's east side after a [911 call](#) from her parents, Michelle Bowen and Jeffrey Kelley, on June 3, 2006. The brown-haired, blue eyed girl weighed just 35 pounds when she died in a house infested with lice and strewn with trash and dog feces.
- An emergency room physician noted three surviving children in the home were unkempt, "dirty" and had hair infested with "incredible amount(s) of head lice." A Genesee County Department of Human Services caseworker called filth in the house "indescribable."
- The Oakland County medical examiner ruled Rose's death a homicide, saying she died from liver failure compounded by neglect. Court records indicate she had been sick for days in advance of her death, and too weak to stand, but was never taken to a doctor.
- Bowen and Jeffrey Kelley pleaded no contest to involuntary manslaughter in the case and were sentenced by Genesee Probate Judge Robert E. Weiss to 17 months to 15 years in prison.
- How If can you [get help](#) if you suspect child neglect or abuse or if you need help with your children or keeping your home clean,
- What is [child abuse](#)?
- How does the state define [child neglect](#)?

"Her spirits are up. She wants to come home," said Richard Bowen, Michelle Bowen's father. "We're almost counting on it."

Jeffrey Kelley, Bowen's former fiancé and Rose's father, was already denied parole in January and won't be considered again until mid-2009.

But Bowen's case is on hold and her freedom still under consideration, said Russ Marlin, a spokesman for the state Department of Corrections.

For some, Bowen's possible release, less than two years after her daughter died, comes as a shock following a child death that made headlines around the state.

Officials said the tragedy could have been avoided if Rose Kelley's parents had only taken her to the doctor.

Police investigating the case said Bowen told them she knew her daughter was sick for days but never took her to the doctor because she feared losing all of her children once authorities discovered conditions in the home.

A sister of Jeffrey Kelley said Friday that Bowen hasn't been in prison long enough. "For something like this, I don't feel like the time she's served" is enough, said Marva Crow. "If my brother is going to sit behind bars, she should too."

Bowen and Kelley, 35, were sentenced by Genesee Probate Judge Robert E. Weiss after pleading no contest to involuntary manslaughter late in 2006.

At the time, Weiss called them negligent partners in their daughter's death -- "both equally to blame" -- and sentenced the pair to identical prison terms -- 17 months to 15 years in prison.

This year's parole hearings are the first for both.

Genesee County Prosecutor David Leyton would not comment on what the Parole Board has done with Kelley or might do with Bowen.

In cases like theirs, a three-member panel of the 10-member Parole Board decides whether a prisoner should be released by a majority vote. Factors considered by the board include current the offense, prior criminal record, institutional behavior, information from a prisoner interview, and information details from victims and other sources.

"The Parole Board makes those calls," Leyton said. "We don't appear in front of it" in cases like this.

The prosecutor said the possible release of Bowen shows that Michigan sentencing guidelines are lower than people believe.

"It's not that easy to get sent to prison ... (and) the sentences (end up) a lot shorter than people believe," he said.

Michelle Bowen said at her sentencing that she was overwhelmed -- "losing my mind" -- at the time of her daughter's death. She worked full time at Chuck E. Cheese, but didn't make enough to support her family and struggled in dealing with her children's serious health problems.

She, Kelley, and their families have since lost contact with her three other children who were placed in foster care. The couple agreed to give up their parental rights to those children as a part of their plea deal with prosecutors.

"I not only lost my granddaughter, I lost my other grandchildren, and I've lost my own daughter for some time," Richard Bowen said.

"I ain't seen my grandkids since, and we have no rights to see them."

Richard Bowen said his daughter has done what she has been asked to do since reporting to prison.

He continues to contend the state Department of Human Services had a role in Rose Kelley's death, but said his daughter and Kelley deserve most of the blame.

State caseworkers had contact with the family dating back to 1998 and received complaints that the children were living in filth and sometimes going without food.

The original reports

FLINT -- The people who were supposed to look out for Rose Kelley got repeated warnings about what they eventually called "indescribable" filth inside her family's eastside home, according to state documents.

- Read the [article](#) that shows problems percolated for years in the home of Michelle Bowen and Jeffrey Kelley despite five separate complaints to DHS about unsanitary conditions and lice.
- Review the [report](#) from the state Department of Human Services on Rose Kelley's death.

After each contact, Jeffrey Kelley and Michelle Bowen cleaned up their home and children enough to pass a follow-up visit or were referred to parenting classes or other help.

A [2007 Flint Journal article](#) showed the agency knew of repeated hygiene, lice and other problems and received five complaints about unsanitary conditions in the Bowen-Kelley home, according to its own records.

DHS was cleared of any wrongdoing in its handling of the case by the state Office of Family Advocate and the Office of Children's Ombudsman.

Richard Bowen said he has spoken regularly with his daughter but was not familiar with the treatment program she is enrolled in. He said his daughter has "cut off all contact" with Kelley and hasn't told family members what she wants to do with her life if she is released.

"She just wants to get on with her life," he said.

If prisoners are not released by the Parole Board, their cases are reviewed again in 12, 18 or 24 months.

Crow said she wrote to the Parole Board in advance of her brother's hearing but couldn't bring herself to back his release now.

She believes the couple share in responsibility for their daughter's death.

"I'm not able to sit there and tell if they are remorseful (but) this whole situation was unnecessary," Crow said.

Posted by **amccoy18** on 03/22/08 at 10:27PM

DHS, should not be cleared of wrongdoing, they didn't do their job. The only way that they were cleared is that Office of Family Advocate and Office of Children's Ombudsman lied in bed with the State. Michigan do a good job covering their wrongdoing with incompetent investigation with state and independent agency. They should get it right with the first complaint that was made against Bowen

Posted by **martha77** on 03/22/08 at 10:56PM

Poor sweet innocent Rose lived such a neglected life by her parents hands they deserve to stay in prison after all had no second chance ...I am so upset over reading her mother may be let out of prison soon, it breaks my heart she doesn't deserve to live free after the way she mistreated her daughter to the point of her death so preventable and shame on her but I believe she will get what she gave and in the whole grand scheme of life nobody gets out alive and yes we all have to answer to the Lord some day. what a monster these parents are I am ashamed the kids were left in that home to suffer more and die that's all I can say that would not need to be edited out...shame on her parents!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Jury hears closing arguments in ex-teacher's trial

By JOHN WISELY and L.L. BRASIER • Free Press Staff Writers • March 24, 2008

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Closing arguments are wrapping up this morning in the case of James Perry, a former Oak Park kindergarten teacher accused of raping two young boys in a special education classroom.

ADVERTISEMENT

Assistant prosecutor Andrea Dean said Perry is guilty of the charges that he attacked the boys at Key Elementary School in Oak Park in October 2005.

Dean downplayed assertions by defense experts that the boys were influenced by their mothers' questioning.

"Why would you not talk to your child if you had a problem?" Dean asked the jury this morning in her closing argument. She noted that the first boy to accuse Perry had been in the school only two hours.

"This is the child's first day, he's an easy target," Dean said.

But defense attorney Mitchell Ribitwer insisted his client is innocent, noting that the boy, who was 5 years old when he made the allegations, had been exposed to some kind of sexual material before ever coming to Oak Park. The boy used the term tea-bagging, a slang word for forced oral sex, to describe what happened to him in one of his first interviews, telling questioners he learned it from his mother's friend, Reg.

"These charges are incredulous, they are implausible and they are unreliable," Ribitwer said.

Perry, 34, of Ferndale, faces up to life in prison on criminal sexual conduct charges.

An Oakland County jury convicted Perry in September 2006 but Judge Denise Langford Morris threw out that conviction after learning that several people who worked in the special education room were not interviewed by police.

Those witnesses, a student teacher and two aides, testified in this trial that the classroom, which includes a distinctive red couch, was full throughout the school day and couldn't have been the site of the attacks as the boys insist.

Once closing arguments conclude, the judge will instruct the jury on the applicable laws and deliberations will begin.

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Foster system, kids in need of loving parents

County agencies looking for foster parents amidst statewide shortage.

By Emily Prawdzik Genoff

Journal Register News Service

In the midst of a statewide shortage of foster parents, Oakland County foster and adoption agencies want the public to know they are always looking for warm and caring individuals to open their homes to children in need.

"Basically, what it's about is having good moral character, sound emotional health and the desire and awareness to serve children's needs," said Nancy Rebar, director of family preservation with Oakland Family Services.

According to the agency, there were about 17,000 abused and neglected children statewide placed in foster care in 2007. As of June of last year, 1,634 Oakland County children were placed in foster care.

"Some of the myths about (foster) families is that you have to be married - not true, a lot of single folks are foster parents" Rebar said. "Another is you have to own your own home - you don't, you can live anywhere."

Sarah and Ray Eisenhardt of Troy became foster parents nearly three years ago. They've since welcomed six foster children, ranging in age from 2 to 6, into their home.

The Eisenhardts have adopted four of them, one of whom joined the family only last week. In addition, they also live with Ray's two biological daughters.

Sarah said there was "no real specific reason" why she and Ray decide to become foster parents.

"There are just so many kids that need foster parents and I've always been aware of that," she said. "I feel I have a lot to offer."

In any given year, only 2,600 children find foster homes out of 4,000 children in need of homes in the state.

"What usually ends up happening is (foster children) will be placed in a home but it might not be the best match for them," said Sean de Four, the Wayne County regional director with the Judson Center, a nonprofit human service agency in Royal Oak.

"Usually kids get bounced around from homes. They're like a round peg in a square hole and, because there's not a lot of options, that's really not a good thing for the kid at all."

Another reason for the shortage of foster parents is that many current foster parents are adopting their foster children and, as a result, are limited in the number of additional children they can bring into their homes.

"We celebrate every time a child is adopted, but then that becomes a foster home that is not available to take other children," de Four said.

"There's a constant cycle of foster parents leaving the pool because they're adopting kids, which is a good thing, but a challenge, too, because we constantly have to recruit new (families)."

The biggest problem is that the system is underfunded, de Four said.

"There are high caseloads, there's not enough money to hire adequate staff and the resources are so scarce that we're not able to adequately train staff who will work with these families," he said. "The reimbursement rate to foster parents and agencies is too low."

Oakland County children awaiting foster family placement stay in Children's Village, a residential facility for children and youths.

Rebar said children staying at Children's Village are typically there for only a few days until a foster home is found.

"It's a residential facility designed to be short-term to meet their immediate needs, because children do best in a family setting," Rebar said.

Another major problem facing children in foster care is "aging out."

Once a child turns 18 or graduates from high school, he or she is no longer the responsibility of the state.

Nearly 500 children age out of the system every year.

These former foster children are, statistically, more likely to face teen pregnancy, homelessness and trouble with the law than children who are set up with a family.

People interested in becoming foster parents should be at least 18 years old, financially stable, and willing to undergo a background check.

"What we tell families is we're not looking for perfect parents, we're looking for folks who have the ability to love and accept a child," Rebar said.

Clay Taylor of the Capital News Service contributed to this report.

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http://www.dailytribune.com/stories/032408/loc_localn01.shtml

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Head Start director pays visit to Dowagiac Rotary Club

By JOHN EBY / Dowagiac Daily News
Friday, March 21, 2008 10:19 AM EDT

At Head Start, children eat and play - both of which contribute to developing literacy.

During meals, youngsters sit together at a table, "gaining new experiences from different types of food. Every Thursday we have a children of the world menu to introduce different foods from other countries. Children not only talk about the food, but where it came from and that culture.

"Language development is a huge part of literacy development," Mona Davison said.

"The more words they're exposed to, the better able to read they are later in life. Sitting around the dinner table, just in your own home, is not only a wonderful family bonding opportunity, but you're also giving children wonderful skills for reading."

Twice a day, "They hear thousands of words talking and communicating," she said.

"Then they play. Play is children's work. That is how children learn - through play. Through play in the classroom, many skills are developed. Literacy development is actually an integral part of every portion of their day. (In the four-page curriculum) we're looking for four areas of development - social-emotional, cognitive, language and literacy and physical."

Davison directs Paw Paw-based Tri-County Head Start, a federally-funded preschool program established in 1965.

Tri-County Head Start works with families as partners in learning in Cass, Van Buren and Berrien counties.

Head Start has a center by Second Baptist Church in Dowagiac for 68 3- to 5-year-olds in two classes. It also has a program in Cassopolis and two in Niles - Bertrand and a contracted site with Northside.

Depending on their age when they enter the program, children could attend Head Start one to two years before kindergarten.

Head Start also has 144 children enrolled in a home-based option. Eleven home visitors stop for an hour and a half once a week. Children then come to a center twice a month for socialization.

"The goal of the home-based program is to have the parents be the teachers," Davison said. "Some parents are very rurally located and it's difficult to get to a center."

Davison in 2004 came from Ann Arbor to succeed 34-year director Orion Flowers.

She began with Head Start as a teacher in Shepherd, near Mount Pleasant. Davison lives in Richland. Her two children attend school in Gull Lake.

"We work with children 3 to 5 years old living in poverty," she told Dowagiac Rotary Club Thursday noon at Elks Lodge 889. "We also recruit children with disabilities. And we also can take at least 10 percent of our children over income" guidelines. "But the goal of Head Start is school readiness - not just for children, but parents, their first and foremost educators."

Tri-County Head Start serves 1,026 children at 16 centers spread out over 1,600 square miles with 28 teachers, 160 total staff, two kitchens and a \$6.7 million budget.

Cass County Board of Commissioners Chairman Robert Wagel serves on her board.

Davison described some of Head Start's tools.

Al's Pals - Kids Making Healthy Choices is a resiliency-based social-emotional curriculum. It is research-based and recognized as a model program by the Department of Health and Human Services. Teachers and assistants receive a comprehensive two-day training on using it. Each classroom has a kit with teacher manuals.

Zoo-phonics is a part of the literacy curriculum that focuses on learning letter sounds and shapes by linking them to animals.

Each animal - Allie Alligator, Gordo Gorilla or Kayo Kangaroo - also has an action to go along with its letter.

For Allie Alligator, extend arms forward, one over the other, forming an alligator's mouth. Open and close your arms while saying the "a" sound.

"Learning letters in isolation isn't what kids need," Davison said. "They also need to remember what the sound is because that helps them in their reading. We began this about two years ago. The reaction we've gotten from parents has been so positive. They really are seeing improvement in their children's understanding of letters, and that letters have meaning. You put letters together and that makes words. You put words together and that makes sentences - and then you have a story," such as "We're Going on a Bear Hunt, which children at the Dowagiac Head Start Center wrote.

Zoo-phonics "is not all we do for literacy development, but it's an important piece," Davison said. "Head Start mandates that children know at least 10 (of the 26) letters by the time they leave us."

They also build books around their classroom mascot, Scrubby Bear.

Scrubby Bear "helps children learn ways to stay healthy - brushing your teeth, covering your cough," she said. Children journal to practice writing.

Four times a year, "Adventures in Reading" books in English or Spanish are sent home with each child. It contains a calendar and questions pasted inside. The calendar is so "that month revolves around that book," Davison explained. "The other part of reading is remembering what you read and being able to make assumptions about what's going to happen in a story. We do this program to encourage parents to read the same book over and over," even though, "My mom read 'Green Eggs and Ham' so many times she said she'd probably never read it again. But that's important to children, to hear the same story over and over. (City Clerk James) Snow read at Dowagiac Head Start this morning. They love having guest readers. I've been all over the place this month, reading.

"It's important in developing literacy in children for them to see people enjoying books. We want to get through to parents how important reading is, so we have monthly meetings for parents at each center. We help parents get library cards" and provide a pamphlet, "Raising a Reader/Raising a Writer."

"It doesn't take a lot," Davison said. "It just takes you. It takes your time. If parents have literacy issues, it's our job to help them find a place to go where they can increase those skills. We don't offer adult literacy, but we do coordinate with whoever offers those services in a community."

Each child has a portfolio documenting their school development, of which literacy is a portion.

"We do have a computer in each class," she said. "As we know, children do need to be exposed to technology. It helps them learn to read. Zoo-phonics has a CD-ROM that's more of a game. There are some very good computer programs to supplement literacy development."

"We're noticing an enormous increase in the number of Spanish-speaking children," Davison said. "We have a translation specialist on our staff, and we actually do look for staff who are bilingual. Hartford is one of our centers where in a classroom of 15, eight are bilingual and two are completely Spanish. We do find that Spanish-speaking children are quick at picking up the English language."

Michigan Chronicle Online - <http://www.michronicleonline.com/articlelive>

Helping secure stable future for families and children

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By Cornelius Fortune

Cornelius Fortune

Published on 03/19/2008

The Child Care Coordinating Care Council of Detroit/Wayne County Inc., or 4C, has been committed to the community and its families for over 37 years.

Child Care Coordinating Care Council of Detroit/Wayne County Inc., or 4C

The Child Care Coordinating Care Council of Detroit/Wayne County Inc., or 4C, has been committed to the community and its families for over 37 years.

On Friday, March 28, actors Voltaire Sterling and Nate Parker, stars of the motion picture "The Great Debaters," will visit the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History as part of a benefit for the 4C.

Carol Quarterman has served as executive director for 29 years, and is thrilled for Detroit to have been selected as the first stop of the national tour. The movie will be shown free of charge.

"We were selected by the promoters and organizers of the tour and we're just very appreciative that Detroit/Wayne County will be a recipient of these charity dollars," Quarterman said. "We do make a significant impact to the community and we will use the dollars wisely, investing in our children."

Children are the heartbeat of the organization, she added.

"One of things that has been well documented, not only in Detroit Public Schools but schools across the country, is that African American children start school with significantly lower language skills than the majority of the population," Quarterman said. "Our education system is built around language, and if we're not talking to children in a really conscious manner that's giving them new words, and giving them language to use, they are at an disadvantage."

She estimates that the majority of 4C's clientele is African American, the organization is open to Arab, Latino, Asian, Native America and White cultures.

"We service the entire county," she said. "Sixty or seventy percent are single parents. We are a resource to all families regardless of the family structure and their socioeconomic level, etc."

For more information on the March 28 event, call (313) 259-4411, ext. 303, or visit www.detroitwaynecounty4c.org.

Community must support Eva's Place

Port Huron Times-Herald

March 24, 2008

Sanilac County shelter needs \$24,000 to keep its doors open

Sanilac County's only 24-hour emergency shelter is in peril. The community must come to its aid.

For more than six years, Eva's Place has served a critical need to county residents in great peril. It provides a safe refuge to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and to people without permanent places to live.

Despite the importance of that service, a shortage of money could force the facility to close.

The crisis is a familiar one. Nonprofits, such as Eva's Place, are victims of hard times.

Michigan is saddled with a weak economy and Sanilac County is suffering. Unemployment and home foreclosures make the shelter's need more important than ever. Those circumstances also mean more groups are competing for the same available money - state and federal funds, as well as grants from local sources.

With the funding divided among more recipients, financial support to Eva's Place inevitably became smaller.

Sherri Lanctot is the fund-raising chairwoman of the Sanilac Area Violence Elimination Council, the organization that operates the shelter. In a March 5 Times Herald letter to the editor, Lanctot said the shelter needed \$30,000 to meet its \$125,000 budget.

Thanks to generous local donations and a \$2,000 grant from the Federal

Emergency Management Agency, Eva's Place now needs \$24,000. The council has no choice but to ask the community to dig a little deeper.

Eva's Place operates on a tight budget. The \$125,000 ensures the shelter is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That requires paying for heat, utilities, a security system and to ensure a full-time staff member is on duty at all times.

If Eva's Place were to close, Sanilac County residents who need its services would have to look beyond the county's borders. That's difficult if you are trying to find a safe house for protection from an abusive spouse or you're seeking adequate shelter when you've lost your home.

In a better world, the shelter would receive the public funding it needs to operate. Unfortunately, members of the community must do what government sources cannot.

The Sanilac Area Violence Elimination Council will stage an April 17 fundraiser, a flamingo fling, 5:30 p.m. at the Westpark Inn in Sandusky. You also can contact Sherri Lanctot at (810) 648-5463 to make a donation to the shelter.

The shelter has helped countless people. It's time the facility receives the assistance it needs to survive.

HOW TO HELP

EVA'S PLACE SHELTER

- ☐ For more information about helping the shelter meet its budget, call Sherri Lanctot at (810) 648-5463.
- ☐ The Sanilac Area Violence Elimination Council will have a flamingo fling at 5:30 p.m. April 17 at Westpark Inn, 440 W. Sanilac Road.
- ☐ Registration costs \$25 and is required for the ladies-only event. All proceeds will benefit Eva's Place.
- ☐ For details, call (810) 648-5463.

Health *Is* a Right

By David Parrella



Public Health and Medicaid? To many people, this can seem like an unlikely pairing. Rival moieties within the same clan. The survey and certification people vs. the claims payers. The Birkenstocks vs. the wingtips. The kinder, gentler world of underfunded preventive care vs. the bloated Tyrannosaurus Rex.

Yet the bean counters and the health care hippies actually do promote a common agenda. The public health world is rapidly evolving from the Nurse Ratched regulators of the last century to the Amazon guardians of quality health-care delivery. At the same time, Medicaid has been transformed from a giant ATM machine into one of the largest, most sophisticated purchasers of health care in the nation. Both camps have more to learn from each other in the pursuit of the common goal of quality accessible health care for all Americans.

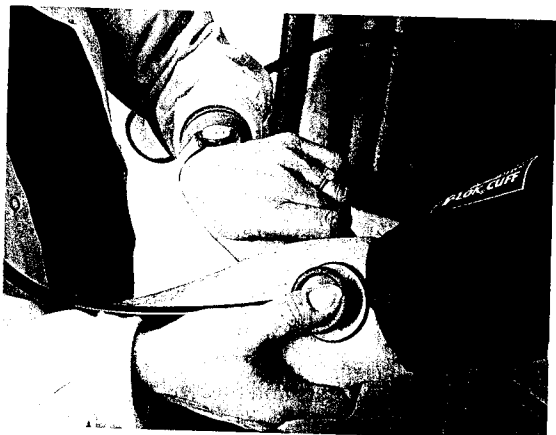
After all, Medicaid is collectively the largest and most expensive health insurance system in the country. And many of the biggest cost drivers are the result of the kinds of conditions that preventive health care can most effectively manage. Unfortunately, health-care prevention has yet to produce an alternative existence to a life in poverty, or at least the grinding treadmill of low-wage existence that our clients trudge through, with all of the adverse affects of bad diet, bad behaviors and bad access to health care that come along with it.

What can Medicaid do in the interim to keep Americans healthy?

- Medicaid is the dominant financier of the care provided to our most vulnerable populations. Almost half of children under the age of 19, 40 percent of newborns and two-thirds of the recipients of long-term care, whether

David Parrella is the Medicaid director in Connecticut.

Health, and not necessarily health care, is a right, not a privilege.



in the home or in an institution, receive their health care under Medicaid.

- Medicaid is the last, best hope of the safety net system, a system that serves Americans who may not even be eligible for Medicaid. Unless the current administration in Washington succeeds in its recent campaign against case management, rehabilitative services, public hospital and medical education, Medicaid will continue to be the financial bulwark for programs that serve persons with cognitive, behavioral and physical disabilities and, indirectly at least, the uncounted mass of Americans who crowd into the safety net sites who are not eligible for any program. Federally Qualified Health Centers, teaching hospitals, and children's hospitals would be hard pressed to keep their doors open based solely on the largess of the commercial health-care system.

- Medicaid is the not-so-secret glue that holds the seamy underside of the so-called health-care system together. Strange funding categories like hospital disproportionate share, emergency medical assistance, school-based child health, certified public expenditures, interagency transfers and the like are all on the most wanted list at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. But they pay the bills that no one else wants for care they reluctantly provide to those individuals the system tries hard not to recognize. It costs money not to rely completely on the kindness of strangers to care for the uninsured.

- Medicaid will bear the costs of the aging of the baby-boom generation. Self-indulgent to a fair thee well, my generation is already consuming vast quantities of health-care dollars in an effort to remain wrinkle free and sexually aroused. We haven't even begun to pay for the accumulated costs of a mis-spent youth. Long-term care, are you ready to rock?

So if Medicaid is going to be the ultimate recipient of adverse risk, are we already beyond hope of investing more in public health? What is the benefit of that investment to Medicaid directors who must deal with immediate budget cuts in an impending recession rather than making prudent decisions to lessen the burden for Medicaid directors of the future?

The reason is, in the absence of such an investment, we have seen the future, and it doesn't work.

- We need a healthy workforce in the future, if for no other reason than to take care of us. When I speak to students, I tell them they should get angry and get engaged because our lifestyle decisions are going to keep them working longer for less. We don't want them questioning their obligations to us, so someday we're just going to have to do the right thing and give them coverage, whether we like it or not. To do so, we're going to have to maximize the public-health contribution to disease prevention in order to make it even marginally affordable. The social and biological costs of not doing so would be too horrible to contemplate. We're not *that* stupid.

- Prevention works. Immunizations, fluoridation and lifestyle changes do reduce the incidence and severity of disease. Health, and not health care, it turns out, is cheap.

- Activities that support quality health care delivery and reduce waste do result in better outcomes.

- Surge capacity in the current system is a myth. All you need to do to see the evidence of that is to visit your local emergency room in a semi-large city on a Saturday night. In case of a pandemic event or a bioterrorist attack, most of our urban health-care centers would more closely resemble lower Manhattan under attack by a giant reptile in *Cloverfield* than they would some orderly disaster drill coordinated by your local health department. The current war on states to reduce funding for the safety net could, in the end, endanger national security.

- Our mothers were right. Happy people are healthy people. Academic studies have shown time and again that people with a smile on their face and a song in their heart smoke less, exercise more and are less likely to be obese and depressed. Behavioral health programs, including prevention programs long suspect in the eyes of Medicaid, should be the Smiley "Have a Nice Day" Happy Face of the new health-care system. Why let the pharmaceutical companies have all the fun?

And so my esteemed colleagues, Medicaid, public health and human services can and must work together if we're ever going to get this right. Maybe it's the early effects of senile dementia, amplified by a happy and satisfying personal life as I tiptoe past the residue of midlife, but I think we are going to get it right this time. Don't listen to the cynics who say that universal coverage is unattainable. It may not be universal coverage under the traditional Medicaid rules, and that's OK. Medicaid will always be there for some of the population. But the other 50 million Americans may need something else that builds on their own as-yet-unanswered pleas to be healthy as part of the pursuit of happiness. Health, and not necessarily health care, is a right, not a privilege. ■



Food banks hungry

Monday, March 24, 2008

MARY L. LAWRENCE

THE SAGINAW NEWS

Eating or heating? Pills or produce?

Families are facing difficult decisions as rising food prices and shrinking household budgets send more mid-Michigan residents to soup kitchens and food pantries to make ends meet.

As a result, food assistance agencies are running low on supplies.

"People are making some hard choices. Senior citizens especially are having to decide between buying food or getting a prescription filled to make their budgets last," said Rich Premo, president and chief executive officer of Hidden Harvest.

"We don't give donations directly to individuals, but the food pantries are telling us their shelves are nearly bare. Our goal this year is 137,000 pounds of food a month. We're exceeding that goal, and the agencies still need food."

Saginaw's East Side Soup Kitchen is feeding more than 300 people a day.

"That's about 80 more hungry people a day compared to two years ago," said Pam Cole, director of the agency at 940 E. Genesee in Saginaw.

At the same time, Cole said, cash contributions have dropped by \$10,000 to \$15,000 this year, and food donations have slowed. The agency spends about \$2 per meal. The kitchen serves lunch from 11 a.m. to 11:20 a.m. and 11:50 a.m. to 12:20 p.m. weekdays.

"We're seeing more people and more new faces all the time," Cole said. "We mostly need cash donations, but we're low on canned goods and kitchen staples, too."

A 2007 U.S. Department of Agriculture report shows that 12.6 million American households were finding it difficult to provide enough food for their families.

Federal figures released earlier this month indicate grocery costs increased

5.1 percent during the past

12 months as the country experiences the worst grocery inflation in nearly 20 years. The Agriculture Department predicts prices will climb another 3 to 4 percent this year.

Cole said the soup kitchen needs basic food supplies -- canned fruits and vegetables, coffee, canned tuna and other nonperishable foods.

The emergency food pantry at SS. Peter and Paul Catholic Church, 4735 W. Michigan in Saginaw Township, is in a similar situation.

"The cost of food -- and just about everything else -- costs more," said Diane P. Cunningham, 65, pastoral associate at the church.

Volunteers from four congregations -- St. Stephen and Holy Spirit Catholic churches, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church and First United Methodist Church -- assist SS. Peter and Paul in keeping the pantry stocked and open.

"We've seen an increase in emergency food requests in the last four years," Cunningham said. "We were skimpy after Christmas."

The pantry is open from 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays. Those seeking assistance must bring photo identification and proof of income. If they qualify, they receive enough food to feed up to a family of five for a week.

"The food pantry is something people in this consortium are committed to," Cunningham said. "And it's not always Catholic organizations making monetary donations to help fill the gaps."

In observance of Lent, the 40 weekdays that preceded Easter, members of her parish participated in a variety of collections to help fill the pantry.

"We put on a big push. Members would come in with bags of food. It looked like they were coming out of the grocery store as they came into church," she said.

"Within our parish boundaries, we have families that are struggling in many different ways. The focus of this parish is being aware of the need."

Many Michigan families are turning to food banks and soup kitchens to stretch household budgets, agreed officials at the Food Bank Council of Michigan in Lansing.

The council gathers food and funds to help stock the shelves of member food banks in all 83 Michigan counties.

Some families are having to choose between eating or heating, said Bill Long, the council's interim executive director.

The average household paid \$986 for heat this winter, 10 percent more than last year, said Long, former chairman of the Michigan Public Service Commission, the state regulatory body for public utilities. Families forced into choosing between heating their homes and food should talk to their energy supplier to maintain heat and contact a food bank for assistance, he said.

Meanwhile, a growing number of eligible people are taking advantage of the federal government's surplus food distribution.

The Saginaw Community Action Committee, 2824 Perkins in Saginaw, has increased its customer count to 1,803 clients from 1,163 last summer.

The agency's allotment is 2,200 people, so it can accommodate more. Those taking advantage of surplus food ease the demand on food banks that rely on private donations.

CAC officials say a "working poor" or low- to middle-income family of four, for example, can have a weekly income of more than \$500 and still qualify for surplus food. Families with senior citizens may have even higher incomes and qualify.

Food packages worth more than \$50 include canned meat, vegetables, fruit, rice, pasta, beans, juices, soups, sauces and peanut butter.

Hidden Harvest, based in Saginaw, delivers food to more than 170 agencies throughout Saginaw, Midland and Bay counties. The food gleaning agency doesn't charge for delivering food to soup kitchens, food pantries, shelters for the homeless, shelters for women and children, after-school initiatives and senior housing centers.

"Prices are soaring, and it's affecting everyone. More people are affected by this economic slowdown," said Premo, its CEO.

"No matter the donation, we never have any leftovers. We just distributed 25,000 pounds of cucumbers we got from a shipper." v

Mary L. Lawrence is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9676.



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Fundraiser for food pantry

Saturday, March 22, 2008

DECATUR -- A fundraiser for the Decatur Human Services' food pantry and emergency fund will be held on Friday at the Decatur Township Hall, 103 E. Delaware St.

The benefit soup supper will be hosted by First Church of God from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. The menu will include an all-you-can-eat variety of homemade soups and chili, bread, beverages and desserts. The cost is \$3.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Good Friday prayers for the homeless

Saturday, March 22, 2008

BY ROBERTO ACOSTA

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KALAMAZOO -- Trudging through a spring snowstorm, more than 40 bundled-up walkers marked Good Friday with song and prayer around Kalamazoo to call attention to the suffering of the homeless.

"It is often easy to overlook or forget about the homeless in our midst and their suffering," said Rev. Cynthia Black, rector of Parish Church of Christ the King.

The walk, Good Friday Prayers in the City, was sponsored by Parish Church of Christ the King; Open Door/Next Door, a shelter for men and women; First Presbyterian Church of Richland; and People United to Secure Housing, a homeless advocacy group.

"My history and passion are why I'm walking," said David P. Artley, Kalamazoo County's director of resource development and special projects.

Artley, who has been working for the county for 15 years, said he knows about the struggles of the homeless, having been homeless "many moons ago."

"I slept in a cardboard box one winter, an entire winter," Artley said. "I have a moral obligation to do more to help."

Monika Trahe, development coordinator at Ministry With Community, a day shelter that provides basic services for the homeless, said the march marked "the journey some of the members of the homeless community take every day."

The walk started at Ministry With Community on North Church Street and made stops that included the Rickman House, the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission and Martin Luther King Jr. Park.

Harry Cartwright walked with the group on Friday. Homeless since July, he said he has been staying at the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission and that the life wears on him.

"It's hard on the human experience," said Cartwright, 54. "Every day, just living with other people, the depression I see ... it's hard."

Artley, who joined the walkers outside of the county Administration Building, said he believes more can and should be done to help the homeless.

"Don't we have an obligation to put our hand out, as a hand up," he said.

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THE BAY CITY TIMES

Nonprofit offers free prom dresses to those who can't afford one

Monday, March 24, 2008

By Pati LaLonde

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It's the highlight of the school social season - prom.

While many girls and their moms are spending days looking for that special dress, there are just as many girls who can't afford the outfit needed to attend this fashionable event.

That's where Becca's Closet comes in.

Established four years ago in Bay City by Natalie Probst, Becca's Closet, 120 Jackson St., offers prom and homecoming dresses to girls in need.

Twelve of those dresses will be highlighted at a fashion show set for 2 p.m. Thursday in the auditorium at Bay City Central High School, 1624 Columbus Ave.

Kellie Brennan, a senior at Central, and leader of the Bay City chapter of Becca's Closet, says dress donations will be accepted at the show.

"We have short dresses, long dresses, puffy dresses, sequin dresses," Brennan said. "We have new dresses, we have gently worn dresses."

Nicolette Sheller, a junior at Central, will be modeling dresses during the show.

"I think it's a great opportunity for girls in financial need," she said. "They can experience homecoming and prom without all the worries about having to buy a dress, shoes. They can just come here."

Starting with a mere

40 dresses in 2004, Becca's Closet now stocks 600 dresses ranging in size from 0 to 18 - as well as a few 20s and one 40 - in every color and style imaginable, along with shoes and jewelry. There are a few dress pants and suits for the guys as well.

Dresses are donated by students, adults and New York-based Demetrios Bridal. The dresses are shipped to the Becca's Closet headquarters in Florida, where the organization started, and then transported to the 70 Becca's Closet chapters across the country.

Brennan is hoping the fashion show will let other students know help is available and let the public know about the organization, which is in need of help itself.

"Our organization is so amazing," Brennan said. "We help so many girls. I wish people would realize that and help us. Last homecoming season, we helped 60 girls. We're hoping to exceed that for prom."

In all, the Bay City chapter of Becca's Closet has provided dresses to 250 girls since it was founded.

In addition to dresses in larger sizes, shoes and accessories, the nonprofit organization is in need of basic things such as racks for the dresses and a place to call home.

The group was moved into a hallway at the Jackson Street location after homecoming. After prom, they

may have to move again.

Cindy Miller, director of the United Way Bay County Volunteer Resource Center and head of Students United, which sponsors Becca's Closet, says the group is looking at a possible move to the Cat's Meow resale shop run by Do-All Inc.

"It's just temporary where we are right now," Miller said.

Miller says the group currently is renting its dress racks.

"We're trying so hard to find a space for what we do," Brennan said. "We want to try to get an area that's accessible."

Shopping at Becca's Closet is by appointment only from 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. and

3:30-5:30 p.m. on Saturdays. Brennan said she will work around girls' schedules if needed.

For more information, call (989) 892-0615, or visit

www.beccascloset.org, click on 'Local Chapters' and scroll down to 'Michigan.'

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Michigan Report

March 24, 2008

WELFARE CASES CONTINUE DECLINE

Both regular and extended Family Independence Program cases continued to decline in February, according to a report from the Department of Human Services.

Total, there were 79,296 FIP cases in February, the [report](#) said, including 5,445 extended cases, where families receive minimal benefits to maintain eligibility for job training and other services.

That extended caseload was down from 6,046 cases in January and 6,152 in December and 6,290 in November, a Department of Human Services.

Those cases continue to track about six months behind changes in the regular caseload, the length of the extended benefits.

Regular assistance cases also continued to fall in February, to 73,851 from 73,985 in January and 74,666 in December. That caseload has been falling since spring 2007.

The Food Assistance Program continued to set record highs for caseloads with 586,024 in February. The last four months have represented record high caseloads with 580,679 cases in January, 575,711 cases in December, 572,769 cases in November and 570,276 cases in October.

Childcare assistance fell in February to 52,139 cases after growing in January, to 55,560 cases from 55,081 cases in December. The program saw caseloads fluctuate over late summer and early fall.

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Granholm appoints Frankenmuth resident

Sunday, March 23, 2008

THE SAGINAW NEWS

Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm appointed Randy R. Barst, director of the Saginaw County Department of Human Services, to serve on the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention and Control Commission through 2010.

Barst is a Frankenmuth resident. v

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POLPOURRI: Domestic partners benefits measure goes nowhere, but there's a reason

Posted by [The Grand Rapids Press](#)

March 22, 2008 14:30PM

LANSING -- An Ottawa County lawmaker may have been channeling Rosanna Anna Danna last week when he moved to halt payment of benefits to domestic partners of state employees.

"Michigan is struggling through tough economic times these days and we can't afford to spend millions of taxpayer dollars on unnecessary benefits," state Rep. Arlan Meekhof, R, Olive Township, said in a news release.

The release said the budget amendment failed on a "strict party-line" vote Thursday. One problem. State employees do not get domestic partner benefits and never did, said Megan Brown, a spokeswoman for Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

In other words, nevermind.